

Daniella Napolitano, A Beginner's Guide to Phoenix Flora and Fauna, 2019. Handmade blizzard books. Hand-set type, photopolymer print, and pressure print. 4.25 × 6.25 inches each. Photo courtesy of the artist.

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES: AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIELLA NAPOLITANO

Interview by Bobby Lee

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Bobby Lee is a photographer and book artist interested in landscape, nature, and conceptions of place. Originally from Southern California, he loves to travel and explore deserts, mountains, and cities with equal curiosity. He is currently an MFA candidate in art at the University of Nevada, Reno, exploring the intersections of photography and book arts with AB Gorham, director of the Black Rock Press. bleephoto.com.

FROM BOOKS, WORKSHOPS, internships, traditional degrees, and certificates to internet searches on YouTube, there are many ways that students are learning about book arts. One of the great things about the field is its versatility in connecting to different media, ideas, and purposes. We wanted to learn more about current and recently graduated students of book arts, where they're coming from, what they're thinking about, and how they're incorporating bookmaking into their art, work, and careers. In the first of a series of interviews with book arts students, we talked to MFA graduate student Daniella Napolitano (she/her/hers).

Please tell us a little about yourself and where you are in your education/career. What was your path to book arts?

My name is Daniella Napolitano, and I am a third-year MFA graduate printmaking student in the School of Art at Arizona State University. My introduction to book arts was in undergrad when I studied abroad in Florence, Italy, and took my first artist books class. Through my undergraduate university's study abroad program, I attended Studio Arts College International (SACI), an American school based in Florence. However, it recently closed due to COVID-19 in 2021.

I was instantly hooked on how intimate the art form can be. I've always been a hands-on person and loved that with artist books, you can hold and touch the art. When I started my graduate studies at Arizona State University, an advisor suggested the book arts studio course, and I remembered how much I loved making books in undergrad. I took the course, and my professor (now thesis chair), Heather Green, was instrumental in helping me figure out how to incorporate books into my current research.



Two details of *A Beginner's Guide to Phoenix Flora and Fauna*, 2019. Handmade blizzard books. Hand-set type, photopolymer print, and pressure print. 4.25 × 6.25 inches each. Photos courtesy of the artist.

What do you like most about working with book arts? How are you incorporating book arts into your practice?

As I mentioned before, I'm a very hands-on person. I was that kid who would press every "try me" button in the toy aisle. So I immediately like any kind of art I can interact with. With book arts the viewer can pick up an intricately made book to get a closer look at small details and illustrations in a way that they couldn't if it was shown behind glass in a frame. I have also found that printmaking and book arts are such a good match because of the ease of creating multiples. Sometimes I will make books out of extra prints that I have lying around and experiment with how I can transform them into another form. I'm also an avid reader, and some of my favorite books as a child were the science books that had multiple flaps to look under and cellophane overlays for diagrams. My current research deals with the interactions between humans and the animals that live around them. Field guides, science books, and field journals are all inspirations for my current body of work.

What is one new technique you learned/mastered in a recent project, and is it something you will carry over into future work?

Some of my favorite techniques are folded book structures like the simple accordion book, carousel book, squeeze-box, etc. But one that I was the most excited to apply to my own work was Hedi Kyle's blizzard book. It is a wonderfully adaptable pocket structure. I used it for a set of letterpress printed field guide cards, *A Beginner's Guide to Phoenix Flora and Fauna*, and I've been wanting to expand that project ever since.

What is a technique, process, or skill you would like to learn?

I tend to gravitate toward folded book structures because I am not the best at binding. I would love to be able to practice different sewn structures and learn more complex binding techniques.



What's one challenge that you've faced in book arts or in your art practice?

The biggest challenge I've faced in my art practice regarding book arts is time. Print-making and book arts are both time-intensive processes. I'm in a graduate program and there is not enough time for everything I want to do, *especially* when it comes to making books.

Can you tell us about a completed or in-progress project that you're excited about?

I defended my thesis and graduated from Arizona State University in May 2022. My thesis exhibition, *Have You Seen Me? A Guide to Noticing and Understanding*, was a call to action for people to notice their animal neighbors and take the time to understand or appreciate them. The animals depicted in the exhibition are often overlooked, misidentified, or misunderstood. By highlighting "ordinary" urban animals in my work, I remind the viewer that humans share a space with wildlife. I believe the first step to caring about something is knowing it exists. It is generally hard for people to think in abstract concepts, but if you can point out an animal, call it by its name, and pass on information about it, then maybe steps will be taken to understand it better. I personally take simple pleasure in sharing moments with the animals I encounter every day, but it is an impossible task to try to get everyone to love every animal. However, I can hope to help people recognize an animal's place in our shared ecosystem. The biggest challenge in my exhibition was the large accordion book wall installation (20 × 4 × 8 feet). So much of the installation was just a concept on a piece of paper until it was time to install—and I only had three days! Luckily, I had a lot of help from family and friends to get the whole show hung, and my defense went very well.

What do you wish you had in your studio? (More space? A guillotine? More plants? Windows?)

I would definitely love more space in my home studio . . . and a press! We have amazing facilities for all kinds of printmaking and book arts at Arizona State University, which will make it all the sadder when I graduate. I've been slowly purchasing supplies one at a time to help round out my home studio so I can continue the art practice I started while in graduate school.



Circle of Life, 2019 (top). Carousel book. Copic marker and Micron pen. 3 × 15 × 6 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Detail of Circle of Life, 2019. Carousel book. Copic marker and Micron pen. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Installation view of Daniella Napolitano's thesis project, *Have You Seen Me? A Guide to Noticing and Understanding*, 2022. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Detail of large accordion wall installation, *I Think I Saw a Coyote (What does a coyote look like anyway?)*, 2022. Mixed-media, linocut, monotype, and Risograph, paint, cut paper, plywood, MDF. Approximately 20 x 4 x 8 feet (dimensions variable). Photo courtesy of the artist.

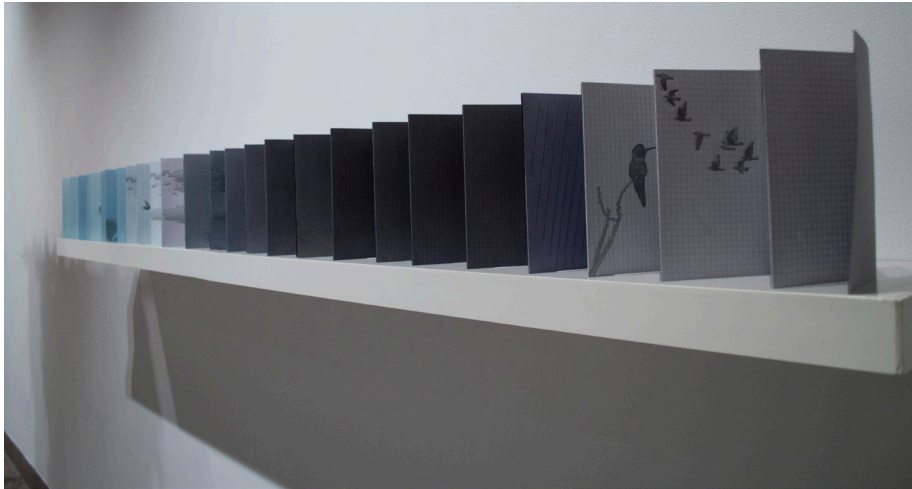


Is there a book artist, printer, artist book, or project that you are currently obsessed with?

I'm constantly fangirling over Keri Miki-Lani Schroeder of Coyote Bones Press, www.kerischroeder.com. The collaboration she did with Julie Chen, *Book of Hours* (2021), is so beautiful, and her boxes are always immaculate.

If you could give a piece of advice to a new student just starting out in book arts, what would it be?

Don't let the process intimidate you from trying new things, make *a lot* of mock-ups, and don't be afraid to try again if you make a bad book! Also, keep your fingers away from any blades (always good advice).



24 Hours: A Somewhat Incomplete Study, 2021. Letterpress printed accordion book on hand-dyed BFK Rives. 7 × 12.5 × 4 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.



Detail of 24 Hours: A Somewhat Incomplete Study, 2021. Letterpress printed accordion book on hand-dyed BFK Rives. 7 × 12.5 × 4 inches. Photo courtesy of the artist.

What are your plans after grad school?

My plans after grad school are to continue teaching at the university level and at art centers in the same area that I'm in now. I'm going to continue printing and making books, although realistically I will likely be making smaller prints and books until I finalize my home studio setup. I'm also very excited to join In Cahoots, incahootsresidency.com, for a residency in Petaluma, California, coming up in the winter! ■

Check out more of Daniella's work and project statements here:

Website: daniellanapolitano.com

Instagram: [@theghostcaptain](https://www.instagram.com/theghostcaptain) and [@ghostprintpress](https://www.instagram.com/ghostprintpress)